

State of Utah Education Address

November 5, 2009

Dr. Larry K. Shumway
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Thank you. Good evening State Board members. Welcome to legislative and government leaders and members of local boards of education who have joined us this evening. Greetings to our professional colleagues and members of the public who are here with us tonight. I want to acknowledge a special guest of mine who is here tonight: my father, Lafe Shumway, who at 91 years of age, continues to be an example to me of life long learning, of service, and of citizenship. Thank you, Dad, for being here tonight.

Thanks to our hosts this evening, Northwest Middle School, to principal Rod Goode, and Superintendent McKell Withers. I also express appreciation to KCPW radio for broadcasting this address.

I am pleased to introduce the 2010 Utah Teacher of the Year, a reading teacher right here at Northwest Middle School. Thank you, Ms. Mary Jane Morris, for your dedicated service and for representing all of Utah's outstanding teachers.

Our Utah schools are places where extraordinary things happen; they are filled with extraordinary people. Let me tell you about Todd Quarnberg, a principal in the Jordan District. When he heard that one of his colleagues needed a kidney transplant, he decided he would give his. It took him weeks to recover, but after he gave his kidney he was right back to work setting an example of selflessness for the rest of us. Let me tell you about Jon Estrada, a junior at Murray High School who is battling cancer while staying in school. He received a Ken Garff "Keys to Success" car last year in recognition of his character and positive attitude. Let me tell you about

Tim Bailey, a teacher at Escalante Elementary School in Salt Lake City. He was just named the National History Teacher of the Year and will receive his award from First Lady Michelle Obama in New York City. Let me you tell you about two students heroes. Casey Gaboldon administered the Heimlich maneuver to her friend who was choking, and Chelsea Pearson pulled her nephew from a swimming pool and administered CPR to save his life. Both girls learned these emergency techniques in their high school health class.

Tonight I am speaking about the state of Utah schools. I'll tell you about some of the successes in our schools and discuss some of the challenges we face. Utah has more than 1000 schools in school districts and 72 charter schools. Charter schools each have a governing board; school districts have boards of education elected by district voters. For all the attention paid to races for President or governor, I believe the most important races are the elections for local school boards. School boards make decisions that directly affect children. Especially now, decisions by local boards can be difficult and thankless. The State Board and I express our deep gratitude to school boards and charter boards for their dedicated and committed work. I ask district and charter board members here tonight to stand so we can recognize them.

We like to say that children are our greatest asset, but something about that phrase strikes me wrong. An asset usually means something owned or potential to be developed for our benefit. We buy assets low and sell them high. I don't think people use this phrase because they think of children as property. Here is my point: when we talk about the education of our children—these precious and priceless young people that are members of our families—we must understand that this is much more than an economic discussion or political discussion.

We have all joked that we old folks need our children to be successful so that they can pay for our social security. This may have some economic truth, but we know in our hearts that the education of our children is not about us, it is about them. It is not to enrich us, but to ensure that each of them has the richest life—rich in every way. I urge all of us to think in these terms as we make education policy and set education budgets.

Now let's talk more about schools. Utah's public schools enroll over 560,000 students. About 80,000 are Hispanic; about 8,000 are African-American; and 7,500 are American Indian. Ten thousand students are Asian and 8,500 are Pacific Islander.

Our school population is growing. We have 19 new schools this year and 12,000 more students. Some growth results from families moving to our state—but most of the growth is what demographers call “natural increase.” This growth comes from large families.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the average population of 100 Americans includes 17.4 school children. The lowest proportion of school children is found in Hawaii with just 15.5 school children per 100 people. The states that come closest to Utah are Arizona and Texas, with just over 19 students per 100. In Utah, we have 21.2 school children per 100 people. We're not just slightly above average—we're the highest. And we're not just slightly ahead. If this were the Indianapolis 500, Utah would be winning not by a car length; we would lead the field by 50 miles.

We spend less than any other state on public education. When it comes to funding, we've told ourselves that at least we're trying hard. It's called the “Utah Paradox”—lots of kids, high taxes, but less money per child. The Utah Foundation reported in 2007 that, while we still have lots of children, our effort to pay for their education has declined. During the 1990s, Utahns committed a higher proportion of personal income to K-12 education than almost any other state,

but paradoxically spent the least per pupil. What was once the “Utah Paradox” is now more appropriately called “Utah Paradox Lost.” We’re still first in the nation for lots of children and last in the nation on spending for education, but our effort is no longer keeping pace. There are reports suggesting that public education’s share of the total state budget has fallen from 36 percent in 1990 to less than 30 percent today.

There are some who believe that the quality of education isn’t related to money. At some level of funding way above ours, this could be true. But in the same way that one cannot pour a 50 foot sidewalk with 25 feet of concrete or drive 500 miles on 100 miles worth of gasoline, our schools can’t provide essential services to students without the needed funding.

So what difference does our low spending make? A 2008 Utah Foundation report noted that the gap between Utah education spending and the national average is \$3,700 per student. About half of that amount is accounted for by large classes and comparatively low teacher pay. Other differences are fewer school counselors, less administrative and instructional support for teachers, and fewer school nurses. The report notes that parents from other states, upon enrolling their students in Utah schools, often ask the, “Where is the . . . ? ” question. As in, “Where is the elementary music program?” Or, “Where is the school nurse’s office?”

I’m often asked about large classes. Utah’s pupil-to-teacher ratio is about seven students higher than the national average and it’s a great concern to many of us. Lowering class size by seven students per class would require hiring nearly 10,000 additional teachers at a cost of more than one half billion dollars. We would need to build classrooms for these teachers, the equivalent of 200 new schools. Or, in the alternative to building, all of the schools in the state

would move to a year-round school calendar. I'm not proposing these things tonight, but we ought to know where our level of funding leaves us.

Here is the key understanding: A Utah student's education is different because of our low spending. And the amount we spend matters.

Where is spending for schools headed? From last school year to this school year, the state appropriation for public education fell by \$172 million, a cut of about 5-1/2 percent. This loss of \$172 million means fewer teachers, larger classes, fewer school days, and lower annual pay and benefits for school employees. Each school district and charter school made its own decisions to manage lower funding, so I'll give you some specific examples.

In the Granite District spending for the current school year was cut by \$28 million, starting with deep reductions in the central office. Still more cuts were needed. The district cut two school days, with a direct impact on students and instruction. The days for teacher employment were reduced by 5-1/2 days, with a wage loss for the average teacher of nearly \$1,400. The district raised the teacher-to-student ratio by a quarter student, which may not sound like much, but it amounts to one or two fewer teachers per school, and 150 fewer teachers across the district. The district also moved ninety mentor teachers, reading teacher coaches, and math teacher coaches back to classrooms, and cut five school administrative positions. Overall, the cuts in the Granite School District resulted in larger classes, fewer school days, less support for teachers, and lower pay for all school employees.

The Millard School District is a small district located in central Utah, with schools in Fillmore and Delta. Balancing the budget in this small district required cutting the school year by five school days. The district also reduced the employment for all school employees by another

three days. Students lost five days of class time and employees lost eight work days, a pay cut of more than four percent. The Millard district also raised class size and cut 21 jobs across the district. As you can imagine, these were very painful cuts in a small district. The total effect: higher class sizes, fewer days of class for students, and lower pay for all employees. In small towns, cuts like this reach across a community. The loss of 21 jobs in Millard County dramatically affects the local economy.

These cuts were repeated in all 41 school districts and all the charter schools. The cuts were difficult and required sacrifices.

I want you to know that, despite these cuts, dedicated educators all across this state continue to work hard under challenging circumstances. No students have been excluded because of lost funding, no one has been turned away. You can be sure of this: despite larger class sizes, despite lower salaries, despite reduced support, Utah students continue to benefit from the very best efforts of their teachers, and they deserve our respect and thanks. Please join me in recognizing our terrific teachers.

But let there must be no misunderstanding. Larger classes and fewer reading specialists mean that some students won't receive the attention that they need to succeed. Lower salaries and fewer working days mean less preparation and professional development for teachers. These cuts have hurt.

In the upcoming session of the Legislature, with our economic situation still perilous, we'll have even less money to spend. Last year's budget cuts were cushioned by the federal economic stimulus program that sent nearly a billion dollars to Utah. Our cut in education would

have been much deeper without that help. Next year, that federal money will have to be replaced with state funds.

We enjoyed a strong economy just before the downturn, so we have some reserves, a “rainy day” fund of about \$540 million. It might sound like a lot, but analysts tell us that revenue in the overall budget may fall short of the state’s needs next year by as much as \$1 billion. The State Board of Education is asking the Legislature to appropriate enough from the rainy day funds to make sure that the cuts to the state education budget are not repeated next year. The Utah School Boards Association and Utah School Superintendents Association both support the Board’s budget. It will be a heavy lift for legislators to find the funds to avoid further cuts to public education, but the State Board and I have high hopes that they will respond to this crisis. Even if we reach the funding goal the State Board has set, let’s remember that next year we’ll have 11,000 more students to educate with the same amount of money as this year.

I wish we could ask for more, and maybe we should. In making this budget recommendation, the Board has aimed for an achievable target. In fact, we’ve tried to aim at the high end of achievable. If we can hit this budget mark in these economic conditions, I will be thankful.

State Board Chair Debra Roberts noted earlier tonight that Utah’s public schools are a constitutional creation. The writers of Utah’s constitution described their purpose as “securing and perpetuating principles of free government.” That is a lofty goal. Public schools are intended to support that vision of securing and perpetuating freedom.

Freedom requires a citizenry that can participate in the civic and political dialogue of the day. It requires a certain level of economic prosperity. Freedom needs a community with strong

social and moral values, along with a loyalty to constitutional principles. Ensuring all these things is not the sole responsibility of public schools. Families, community organizations, and churches all contribute.

The State Board has adopted a statement of vision and mission called “Promises to Keep.” Let me tell you the mission that public schools must fulfill to be successful as instruments of perpetuating freedom.

The first part of the mission is to ensure literacy and numeracy for every child. In today’s world, literacy goes beyond simply being able to read a sentence. It includes writing, speaking, and listening skills, along with strong quantitative skills, that is, math. There is no other success in our schools that can compensate for failure to teach every child to read.

Second is to ensure that all children receive high quality instruction in every classroom every day. We school people know that the contribution we make to student learning is through great instruction in our schools. Whenever we talk about improving student learning, we know that the way to do it is to raise the quality of instruction.

Our third task is to make certain that all students are engaged in curriculum that embodies high standards and relevance to the world students will encounter after high school. We want students to be ready for college or careers, prepared to succeed at whatever they choose. Whether a student pursues a degree in electrical engineering or becomes an electrician, we must be sure that our curriculum is relevant with appropriate standards of excellence so every student is ready.

And fourth, we want assessments that inform both instruction and accountability. In recent years we’ve concentrated so much on accountability for schools that we seem to have lost sight of the goal of helping teachers provide the most effective instruction for every child. We all

want to know if our schools are effective; we can't forget about accountability, but we also need testing that effectively informs teachers, parents and students.

So this is the core mission of public education—to ensure literacy, to provide high quality instruction, to engage students in a rigorous and relevant curriculum, and to assess student learning to inform instruction. We think of these as promises that citizens should expect schools to keep.

Here are some examples of what we're doing in Utah to fulfill this mission. Six years ago, we started a reading initiative. We know that if students are reading on grade level at the end of third grade, their chances for school success are higher. The reading initiative provided matching state funds for local district efforts. In this year's budget the state share is \$15 million. This is a model program because standards and guidelines were set at the state level while local schools and school boards were left with freedom to tailor the reading program to their needs. It is also a model of matching resources.

We're in the second year of an Optional Extended-day Kindergarten program that serves more than 7,000 students. We know that some children won't be ready to learn to read in first grade without additional time for instruction. Senator Lyle Hillyard, who was the legislative sponsor of the program, noted that, "making a difference early on in a child's school career can change the entire course of things to come and may be one of the best choices in spending we ever make."

At Rees Elementary in the Nebo School District, Principal Mike Larsen and his staff were ready when Optional Extended-day Kindergarten was funded. At the end of last year, 100 percent

of kindergarten students at Rees Elementary were ready for first grade reading. Extended-day Kindergarten is a success we can build on.

Let me offer examples of how we're improving the quality of instruction in our classrooms. During the summer of 2009, more than 1,700 teachers participated in the Core Academy, an annual summer program. The Core Academy provides professional development sessions for teachers at every elementary grade level. Here is feedback from Tina Allred, a kindergarten teacher in the Emery School District. She says, "Every session was packed with great ideas I could bring right back to my classroom and use to supplement the core curriculum."

For beginning teachers, we have structured support through the Entry Years Enhancement program. Jennifer Urrutia, a first year teacher at North Point Elementary School in the Alpine District described her experience in the Early Years Enhancement program. She said, "[The program] helps beginning teachers get on track for what is expected of us. My mentor gives me data, ideas, backup, and resources to get help when I need it." With our need to retain great young teachers in the education profession, programs like this are crucial.

Another effort aimed at improving the quality of instruction is a pilot program in performance-based compensation. The aim is to reward teachers' outstanding classroom work. The State Board and I worked closely with teachers, superintendents, parents, and principals to understand what a performance-pay program for teachers should look like. We've begun a pilot program in five elementary schools where teachers and principals are working together to develop a compensation plan that rewards teachers for high quality instruction, student achievement, and community and parent satisfaction. We will have a report on the progress of this pilot program in the spring.

What about high standards and relevance in our curriculum? In 2006, the State Board of Education increased graduation requirements to ensure that students are ready for college classwork or employment. Beginning with graduates of 2011, students must complete four years of language arts, at least three years of math, and at least three years of science. We believe that high standards and relevance are important for every child.

Utah has become a leader in teaching world languages. For years we taught languages like French and Spanish; today we've added Chinese and Arabic. Students in eight elementary schools are learning Chinese in immersion programs, where school is conducted entirely in Chinese for part of the day. And in 85 secondary schools, more than 6,000 students are enrolled in Chinese language classes.

Our high schools also offer great programs to prepare students for training in technical areas or for direct entry into the work force. A program called Pro-Start prepares young people for employment as chefs in our state's restaurants. It's a partnership between Utah high schools and the Utah Restaurant Association. Students work with instructors who are familiar with the real work of chefs in the food service business today. I have attended events where the meals were prepared by Pro-Start students and I can tell you the food was great.

We know our future workforce requires specific training and almost always some post-high school enrollment. The latest workforce statistics tell us that more than sixty percent of jobs in the future will require less than a bachelors degree, but more than a high school diploma. We're working hard to ensure that young people are prepared.

We also want to increase the number of students who are ready for higher education in the most challenging academic fields. The Utah Foundation reported early this week that the number

of Utahns earning four year degrees is declining, and that concerns us. Utah is one of the states that is working on the Common State Standards project, to make certain that our curriculum standards are high enough and clear enough so that students will be well prepared for college.

Our report from the ACT last year tells us that nearly 22,000 seniors completed four years of language arts; nearly 17,000 took four years of rigorous math; 18,000 completed three years of science; and a total of 23,000—68 percent of our graduates—took the ACT.

Utah students took more that 24,000 Advanced Placement tests: Nearly 7,000 Utah students passed the AP Calculus test; in History, Government, and Economics, more than 4,000 students passed AP exams; and in Science, almost 1600 students passed AP tests.

Utah students regularly compete for the highest academic honors in the National Merit Scholar program. Each year, Utah students attain perfect scores on various sections of the ACT test, and on occasion, Utah students achieve perfect scores in all sections. This much I know: A student who is fully engaged in all the opportunities that are available in our schools can get an education in Utah that will be competitive with the very best schools anywhere in America. These great students deserve to be recognized.

Now, on to assessment. We want to be certain that we accomplish the most important purposes of testing—to inform instruction and to provide information to parents and students. The Sevier and Juab School Districts are piloting a program known as “computer adaptive testing.” It’s a challenge to create a test that’s hard enough to push a student, but not so hard that a student can’t answer questions. Computer adaptive testing uses technology to “adapt” student tests “on the fly,” with each question being selected based on the student’s answer on the previous questions. When a student misses a question, the computer asks the next question at a slightly

lower level, until the test zeroes in on what a student really knows. And the results are available immediately. Computer adaptive tests also open the way for growth scoring, results that tell both a student's grade level and the gains made during a year.

The State Board has proposed legislation to allow expansion of the computer adaptive testing program so that more districts can take advantage of this opportunity. We're sure that computer adaptive testing and measuring student growth is the future of assessment, and Utah will lead the way.

We're looking at other changes. We're considering replacing the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test with the ACT for all high school students. We're part of a consortium of states considering common assessments so that we will be able to compare student achievement among states, and we hope, reduce the costs of testing. We also hope to cut the time spent on testing.

Now, there are other challenges to talk about. Throughout the state there are teachers and school employees who are committed people with the best interest of students in mind. We hear far too many reports of educators whose conduct is beyond the pale of professional ethics. The misconduct of a relative few damages the teaching profession and hurts students.

My office is responsible for ensuring that the conduct of licensed educators is above reproach. We have two goals—to keep people with unsuitable backgrounds out of schools, and to remove people from schools whose conduct is outside ethical bounds. Within the last year, the State Board has taken specific action to strengthen rules in both areas.

Since 1994, criminal background checks have been required of all newly licensed educators. The State Board adopted rules last spring to require a criminal background check each time an educator renews his or her license. The Board also requires a criminal background check

at least every six years for all non-teaching employees. We are in the process of developing an online ethics review course to be completed by every school employee at regular intervals.

I call on every educator to hold to the standards of our profession. The misconduct that has been reported in the news is not the result of educators not knowing right from wrong. Every adult knows that an intimate relationship between a teacher and a student is wrong. Let those of us in the profession conduct ourselves in a manner above reproach. We have a special trust, and we know this. And let us help guard each other from the danger of misconduct. I would ask every principal, every teacher, every superintendent to be vigilant for signs of danger and to have the courage to speak up when colleagues seem headed down the path to disaster.

We are in a new environment, with media such as text messaging that allows private communication not possible just a few years ago. Social networking sites make private thoughts and actions public. We have new challenges that require our attention. To address these issues, I am convening a special work group to conduct a full review of the rules and procedures that govern the conduct of school employees. I expect this panel to make recommendations for consideration by the State Board by next spring. This panel will include educators, human resource experts and other professionals. I've asked Dr. Patti Harrington, former state superintendent, to facilitate this group. We recognize the need for action and we intend to respond with vigor.

I want to speak now about achievement gaps. We know that we have to close the gap between the overall graduation rate and the graduation rate among minority students. Last year, our total graduation rate was 88 percent, but for every minority group it was significantly lower. We know this problem had deep roots. We see lower performance across all kinds of measures:

ACT results, end-of-level tests, and even school attendance. We know that students do better if they can read. All of our early interventions target students who are most likely to need additional support to read on grade level by the end of third grade.

For students with limited English proficiency, the graduation rate was only 65 percent. Acquiring English language skills is crucial if students are to be successful in their school work and later in post-secondary studies or employment. So we have invested in programs to help students become proficient in English. We've opened 42 family literacy centers in 34 school districts across the state. In these centers, children and parents work on language skills for the whole family. The data we're collecting tell us that this will improve student achievement.

We have a high school program called MESA—Math, Engineering, and Science Achievement—that helps prepare minority students and women for careers in science, engineering, and math. Last year, nearly 6000 students were involved in MESA activities.

We have other programs aimed specifically at supporting students who need our help. We spent almost \$5 million in funding for these students through the “Highly Impacted Schools” program. \$15 million dollars are appropriated to schools through the “Interventions for Student Success” block grant program; and all \$55 million of our Title I federal funding targets schools where students are most in need of help.

We are making progress. Last year's ACT results told us that more minority students are taking the test than ever before. In the Advanced Placement program, the number of minority students who took AP exams increased by fourteen percent, a growth rate five times that of the overall program.

I've talked tonight about successes and challenges in our schools. It is difficult to find the right balance as we talk about success while still acknowledging needed improvements. I recognize there is work to be done, and I'm also proud of the teachers and students who have worked hard to achieve so much. We know that we need new efforts to train more engineers and scientists. We know we also need skilled EMTs, construction workers, and farmers. We will continue to raise our sights and standards.

We have talked tonight about the constitutional purpose of public schools—to help secure and perpetuate our freedom. And we've talked about the mission of public schools—to ensure literacy and numeracy for all Utah children, to provide high quality instruction for all Utah children, to establish curriculum with high standards and relevance for all Utah children, and to require effective assessment that informs high quality instruction and accountability. These are the promises that we aspire to keep. They are challenging promises that require us to reach higher and strive harder. Together we can keep these promises.

I began with a personal reference to my father. I would like to end by reciting a poem by a wonderfully talented poet, my mother, Loa Jean Shumway, who passed away recently. Here is her poem entitled, "A Passing Thought."

A Passing Thought

We passed as you walked to school,
Giggling and skipping, ponytails flying.
I looked at you and saw myself
Through time's kaleidoscope,
And to myself I said:

“I am you as you are me.

You are the past of me,
I am the future of you.
I am the accumulation of many selves—
Student and teacher,
Grandchild and grandmother,
Daughter, wife, mother, friend,
Layer upon layer of personality.
My today is all you see.

We pass along the road;
You just starting to gather your selves,
And I, on my way home.

All of us, we grownups who are passing children along our road and who have the responsibility for schools: Let us remember that these children who we treasure so highly are just beginning on their journey. They are just starting the gathering up of their many selves. It is our

duty, our privilege, our responsibility to help them on their way. Thank you all for coming tonight. May God bless you and all the children of the great state of Utah.